

Becoming the Servant of Encouragement: Spirit-led

Acts 13:1–5

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Today is the last Sunday in this series of messages from the life of Barnabas the encourager. In this message today we'll be discussing the Holy Spirit. Understanding the Trinity of God is not easy. But, let me try to make it a little more clear with an absurd illustration. Look at your thumb. It's made of up of flesh, blood, and bone. But, it's still a thumb. Now, think Father, Son, Holy Spirit. It may not be the greatest illustration, but hopefully it helps when I saw God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit I'm talking about one being.

I think God put Barnabas on my heart because of the changes He is seeking to make in me. It's hard to admit that a person of my generation, and years of being a Christian hasn't arrived. Jesus is still working on me to make me more like Him. Jesus is still working through me to help others become His disciples. I've said this before that what I say to you on Sunday mornings, or any other day, might have more to do with me than it does with you. Being an encourager: comforting, encouraging, and challenging people was the man Barnabas. As much as I like to say that he is one of my Biblical heroes, I still haven't arrived at being the encourager Jesus wants me to be.

Barnabas was able to encourage others because he was following the Holy Spirit. He responded to the nudge, the prompt, and even the kick. I think we can all agree that we can be better at following the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 13:1–5 (ESV) Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them.

In order to proclaim the gospel Christians need to be Spirit-led. Barnabas and the others in Antioch were praying for direction. These five men have been encouraging people to follow Jesus. Lucien from Cyrene may have been one of the first to have spoken with the people about Jesus. His partner in making disciples may have been Simeon. Could this be the man who carried the cross of Jesus? Manaen had become a Christian. This is amazing because he was a life long friend of Herod, who was a hater of Jews and all things righteous. He became a proclaiming the power of Jesus and the resurrection.

They were Jews that came to Jesus, but they were talking to pagans and idol worshippers about Jesus. Their words of comfort came to wondering souls to choose Jesus. Their words of encouragement touched broken spirits guiding them to salvation in Jesus. Their words of challenge came to sinful bodies empowered them to trust Jesus.

Then along comes Barnabas, who offers more comfort and encouragement to these disciple makers. Barnabas challenges them in their faith to follow the Holy Spirit. These new followers of Jesus were comforting, encouraging, and challenging their neighbors, their friends, and family to follow Jesus. For a year Barnabas and Saul, along with these disciple makers continued to comfort, encourage, and challenge the new believers to live every day for Jesus, following the Holy Spirit.

So after a year these five leaders of the church in Antioch were praying and fasting, fasting and praying. They were seeking the wisdom and the knowledge of the Lord. They were willing to follow the Holy Spirit. They wanted to glorify God. Barnabas and Saul received direction in their mission as they prayed. They knew that their time had come to move on from Antioch. They were aware that Jesus came to save all people, the Jews and the Gentiles (idol worshippers). They followed the leading of the Holy Spirit across the sea proclaiming the gospel – comforting, encouraging, and challenging the people where Barnabas had lived in Cyprus.

The other three men received direction for anointing of these two missionaries. The Holy Spirit had placed upon their souls, spirits, minds, and bodies to commission Barnabas and Saul. They placed their hands on Barnabas and Saul, an act of anointing and sending, while they prayed for the Holy Spirit to speak to them and through, empowering them to carry the Good News of Jesus Christ to those who were unsaved.

The Holy Spirit is speaking all the time to all believers providing us with direction. There is not a day in your life that the Holy Spirit is silent. The Spirit of God maybe comforting you, encouraging you, or challenging you. The Holy Spirit maybe giving you direction on a specific issue in your life. God's Spirit maybe providing you with the power to be faithful and steadfast. Do not doubt the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit in your life.

Acts 11:2(ESV) While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

Is the problem we're not fasting and praying or we're not following the Holy Spirit? I'm going to confess that I don't fast. I know of believers who will set aside specific times and days to fast. On those days they don't eat. They don't have meals, they don't have snacks. They live on water. They go about their regular duties and activities without eating. For them this is a spiritual day dedicated to the Lord.

A long time ago I discovered for myself that fasting and prayer were connected. I think about this way. For me to be in prayer is to be talking to Jesus in such an intense manner that I don't think about food or anything else. So, I have never heard the Holy Spirit calling me to stop eating. I have not yet heard the Holy Spirit telling me to set aside a day to not eat as a spiritual activity.

Prayer and meditation are another thing. I have spent long periods of time praying intensely. I have also had long periods of time where I would think about the words of scripture. I have pondered specific situations in the Bible. Examining them with my mind and my heart. Taking in the actions and the emotions of a situation. I have asked the Spirit of God to reveal to me insight and truth. That doesn't make me better than anyone else, or less than anyone else. It is what God has called me to do. In these moments I have heard the Lord say to me yes, no, and even wait. I have been nudged by the Holy Spirit to take a very specific action. I have been prompted to seek out certain people. Then there are those moments when a light comes on, clarity is revealed, and I know that it's from the Holy Spirit. But, there have been those times when nothing happened. I trusted Jesus to have heard me. I knew that the Holy Spirit was with me. I stood up giving thanks. In those moments when there was no clarity or new insight, I needed to remain faithful and steadfast. The Holy Spirit will speak when we're quiet or in the midst of the chaos. I have had insights, been prompted when I'm alone and also when people are all around me. That is good. God is good. What I'm telling you is that the Holy Spirit of God will make Himself known in His timing. No one is capable of manufacturing a move the Spirit. For the Spirit goes where the Spirit will go and do what the spirit will do. Be ready for the Holy Spirit to take action, speak, and move in your life.

The Holy Spirit either denies or confirms our requests. You and I might go to the Spirit shouting out our demands. But, our demands are not the work of the Holy Spirit. We are either in line with the Spirit of God

and He will tell us; or we are out of line with the Spirit of God and then we will know. Either way if you aren't listening the Spirit will continue to speak until you hear.

The Holy Spirit will nudge, prompt, or kick you. So often we experience a nudge in our heart or mind. We don't know what to do with it. We ignore that nudge, continuing on our own path. The nudge turns into a prompt. This might come from another person. But, we're still uncertain, so we ignore it again. Then comes the kick. This is when I see in my circumstances, maybe a specific situation, the undeniable hand of God. Again we ignore it. Instead of all this denial and ignoring we can follow the leading of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit will plant an idea or give you a specific word. Not everyone gets a face to face conversation with the Holy Spirit. Yet, the Spirit makes a word or thought appear in our minds that seems completely random. It's not as random as you may think. That idea can be the next big revival of the Church. That idea can also be the need to stop what you're doing and pray or speak. The Holy Spirit always agrees with God's plans and purposes. If you hear a small voice tell you to rob a bank, that's not the Holy Spirit. If you feel a nudge to slap your neighbor, that's probably not the Holy Spirit. If you hear a voice that tells you to minister to a widow or an orphan, that might be the Holy Spirit. If you are prompted to speak the truth in love to your enemies, that will be the Holy Spirit.

Acts 11:4(ESV) So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit they went.

Christians who are Spirit-led are fearless and bold. It's possible that when you are fearful and timid you're not following the Holy Spirit. That is a bold statement. I'm speaking from my own personal experience. There have been times when I didn't follow the Holy Spirit. Most of those situations have been when I was fearful. My fear made me timid. It was the fear of being blamed for making a mess of things. Fear is powerful. But, I've learned that fear of this world is less powerful than the Holy Spirit. Jesus is who He said is He is. His promises are true. His authority is unquestioned. Even my fears must obey.

The exception is that sometimes fear and timidity keep us safe. That might not be fear and timidity, it might be wisdom and discernment. When we are wise enough to wait on God's timing. When we discern that the voice in our head is being selfish. The exception is that sometimes fear and timidity aren't related to spiritual things. You better be afraid of driving too fast, of putting your hand in a snake pit, or jumping off of a bridge. You might want to be timid about aligning yourself with immoral people, speaking lies to make yourself look good, and invoking curses on your enemies.

Barnabas and Saul without fear and timidity followed the Holy Spirit. While fasting and praying they both understand the desire of the Holy Spirit for them to leave Antioch. They both knew they needed to take the message to other people: to the Jews first and then the Gentile pagans. They both knew that Cyprus was their next destination. They didn't ask for second and third opinions. They didn't stop to count the cost of a boat trip or the amount of food they would need. Barnabas and Saul followed the leading of the Holy Spirit. They were being led by God's Holy Spirit to do something they had not done before. They faithful took action to comfort, encourage, and challenge the people they meet with the truth of Jesus: He is God's salvation.

When you and I choose to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit we are made fearless and bold. Our hearts might start racing, our palms might get sweaty, our minds might race. But we fearlessly trust Jesus to be with us. We take bold action and speak boldly our love for Jesus. We don't worry about the consequences. We know that the prompting of the Holy Spirit is genuine. We know the plans and purposes of God don't always make sense to us, but are good and perfect.

The fearlessness of the Holy Spirit overcomes old habits, old ideas, old lies. The boldness of the Holy Spirit sees beyond the troubles and problems. There is within the Spirit-led Christian a desire to bring glory to God. The feet, the hands, and the lips of the Spirit-led Christian become active making disciples.

Acts 11:5(ESV) They proclaimed the word of God

Pray, fast, follow the Holy Spirit and proclaim Jesus. Prayer and fasting always lead to the power of the Holy Spirit. We see this in the lives of Barnabas and Saul. If we are honest we've experienced this in our own lives. The Holy Spirit has nudged, prompted, and kicked you. It may not have happened when you were praying and fasting, but it was the result of you talking to Jesus.

Sometimes we don't even know that we are praying for the Holy Spirit to work in our lives. We're just pleading what is in our own spirit. The Lord hears our heart acknowledging that we are ready to do His will. The Holy Spirit nudge comes, the Holy Spirit prompt comes, the Holy Spirit kick happens. We've becoming willing disciples. All the stuff in our lives has prepared us to be faithful. Now we are ready to be steadfast in God's purpose for our lives. Even if we don't know the purpose.

Following the Holy Spirit is the choice we must make throughout each day. Let me say that I want to be a Barnabas, an encourager sure, but a Spirit-led disciple even more. I want my life to be filled one moment after of another following the Holy Spirit. May the desire of my heart, my mind, and my spirit be to follow the Holy Spirit and become more like Jesus. May the words of my mouth and the thoughts in my head be about God's Kingdom coming on earth. May my actions be filled with grace, mercy, and love helping others become disciples.

What about you? Do you want to be a Spirit-led disciple of Jesus Christ? When you've prayed then be ready to be nudged by the Holy Spirit. Be ready to follow His leading. Be ready to be faithful and steadfast in the plans and purposes of God's kingdom. Be ready to take a risk and to be generous with your life.

Someone around you needs to hear about the love of Jesus. Someone needs to know that when Jesus died on the cross, having lived His life faithfully following the Father in heaven, all of their sins were forgiven. They just need to call upon Jesus. Someone needs to know that when Jesus rose from the dead on the third day that they were given the possibility of power over death to live a new life. Someone needs to know that Jesus will return one day to take all who believe in Him to heaven to be with Him forever. Are you that someone who needs to confess, repent, and call upon Jesus?

Who do you know that needs to be saved from their sin, redeemed to a new life, and delivered to the promise of eternal life in heaven? Now is the time to speak to Jesus. Make known to Him your need for His salvation. Call out to Jesus, confess and repent of your sins. Jesus loves you.